Self-regulated learning in junior secondary English

Sue Harrison and Vaughan Prain
La Trobe University

There is continuing interest in identifying factors that influence learning in the middle years. This paper reports a case study that aimed to identify key factors that influenced Year 8 students' self-regulation of learning in English in an Australian regional secondary school with a low socio-economic profile. This study focuses on both students' self-regulatory strategies as well as contextual factors affecting student effort and performance, drawing on an analysis of a) a group of year 8 students' perceptions of self-regulatory learning strategies in tackling two literacy tasks, and b) organisational structures and teaching and learning processes that supported student learning. The paper concludes with some implications for future pedagogical and structural practices.

Introduction

There is now far greater recognition of the complexity of interlocking cultural, pedagogical, and structural factors that influence middle years students' learning (Pendergast, 2005; Prosser, McCallum, Milroy, Comber, Nixon, 2008). Older cognitive models of key enablers of learning, namely student 'will' and 'skill' to succeed (Pintrich & de Groot, 1990, p. 38), have been augmented by far more intricate accounts of contextual factors and their interplay as crucial to improving academic success. Research has also focused on the value of taking into account students' perspectives in this analysis (Prosser *et al*, 2008; Sullivan *et al*, 2009). In this paper we report on some of the outcomes of an attempt in one low socio-economic regional school in Victoria, Australia, to change "normal" curricular organisation and typical daily routines, and create a context of high expectations of student capacity and effort to improve student engagement and self-regulation of learning. The study is presented as indicative of the challenges and opportunities entailed in these changes to students' and teachers' roles for school-based learning.

This research forms part of an ARC funded project investigating factors affecting disengagement with middle years schooling in a regional setting. The so-called WHOLE project examines this issue from multiple perspectives, including general pedagogical and social interventions, and well as specific initiatives in the key curriculum areas of English, mathematics and science. In this paper we present some preliminary findings of a case study that sought to develop Year 8 students' capacities to self-regulate their learning in English in one of the three schools in the project, as part of a multi-dimensional approach to addressing student disengagement. The paper focuses mainly on a case study of student self-regulation of learning, drawing on 11 students' responses to an English program over 11 weeks of schooling in 2008.

Literature review

In developing complex accounts of the conditions that affect student engagement in learning, researchers have shifted focus from the needs of individual learners (effective

motivational tasks or activities, and acquisition of explicit metacogntive learning strategies) to a broader view of affective and contextual factors that contribute to developing learner perspectives, capacities and scope for independence. These include not just students' beliefs about their capabilities, and their views about what is worth learning, including volitional strategies to sustain effort (Corno, 2001), but also a focus beyond the individual learner to pedagogical, classroom and other contextual dimensions. These include the role of domain-specific knowledge (Perry, 2002), peer pressure influence on motivation and effort (Sullivan, McDonough & Prain, 2005), possible co-regulatory strategies modelled by teachers to support learning (Hadwin Wozney, & Pontin, 2005), and the broader classroom organisation of learning experiences (Boekaerts & Cascallar, 2006), including appropriate "material resources" (Prosser, *et al*, 2008, p. 21). There is also far greater acknowledgement of the key role of the teacher-student relationship and the identities student form from this relationship as crucial factors in effective learning (Apple & Beane, 1999; MacBeath, 2006; Prosser *et al*, 2008), where low teacher expectations of student capacities have strong negative effects on student effort (Prosser, *et al*, 2008; Tadich, *et al*, 2007). Researchers have also focused on students' aspirations and beliefs about their own capacities, noting that students' positive views are not always shared by their teachers (Prosser *et al*. 2008; Sullivan *et al*, 2009).

Following Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris (2004), researchers in the WHOLE project consider that engagement should be understood as a multi-faceted construct. From this perspective, engagement can be characterised behaviourally (strong participation in academic, social and extra-curricular activities), emotionally (affective ties with teachers, classmates and school), and cognitively (investment in effort to master complex problems and skills), with overlap across each area. Therefore, any attempt to increase student engagement with schooling necessarily faces complex challenges, both in terms of the scope for action and the expected role of teachers in promoting this variety of outcomes.

While noting that diverse factors influence student effort at school, we consider, like many other researchers (Ames, 1992; Boekaerts, 1999; Grinsven & Tillema, 2006; Zimmermann, 2001; Zimmerman & Pons, 1988), that a key element in engaging junior secondary students is promoting their capacity to self-regulate their own learning. An extensive longstanding literature from the 1980s and 1990s (Ames & Archer, 1986; Pintrich & De Groot, 1990; Zimmermann & Pons, 1988) has defined self-regulated learning as the development of independent learning skills. More recently this definition has broadened to include "multi-component, iterative, self-steering processes that target one's own cognitions, feelings, and actions, as well as features of the environment for modulation in the service of one's own goals" (Boekaerts, Maes, & Karoly, 2005). At the same time, Boekaerts and Cascallar (2006), Hadwin *et al*, (2005) and others, have recognised the key role of learning environments in this mix of academic learning and the development of a sense of wellbeing, where teachers are crucial in determining what kind of self-regulatory possibilities learners are offered. However, despite this strong advocacy of the value of developing self-reliance in learners, many teachers have struggled to provide learning experiences that enable this learning capacity in students.

In recent years researchers in this area have identified a range of strategies teachers can use, and classrooms environments they need to create, to promote this learning. There is broad agreement that students should have a sense of autonomy and responsibility for how and what they learn (Boekaerts, 1999; Boekaerts & Corno, 2005; Butler & Winne, 2005: Dembo & Eaton, 2000; Grinsven & Tillema, 2006; Tadich, Deed, Campbell & Prain, 2007; Winne & Perry, 2000), as well as self-efficacy in using and monitoring effective strategies for this learning (Perry, Phillips, & Hutchinson, 2006). For Boekaerts and Corno (2005) such strategies include motivational engagements, direct teaching of metacognitive skills, mentoring and apprenticeship-oriented work. Teachers should be less directive, and provide students with multiple opportunities for self-evaluation as a basis for developing self-regulatory learning strategies (Zimmermann, 2000, 2001). Tillema, Kessels and Meijers (2000) noted that such an approach shifts the teacher's role fundamentally from monitor and regulator of student learning to activator of learning opportunities. However, Perry (2002) also claimed that self-regulation is closely tied to domain-specific competencies, and therefore teachers needed to focus on fundamental concepts and structures in particular subjects if they were to provide appropriate guidance and feedback for students.

Focusing on the learning environment, Hickey and Granade (2004) claimed that more flexible classroom organisation, where students participated as a community of learners working on extended rich tasks, made students' self-regulatory learning opportunities more challenging but also more meaningful. Hadwin et al. (2005) argued that teachers are crucial in developing student self-regulatory learning capacities, with student self-regulation necessarily starting with co-regulation with teachers. Control should gradually shift from teacher-modelled and teacher-directed learning to more independent student decision-making processes. In this co-regulatory phase, students and teachers alternate between prompting and guiding roles, sharing understanding of the nature and demands of specific domain tasks. As instances of effective practice, Hadwin et al (2005) proposed that the teacher should explicitly focus on the language students might use to set task goals, to explain the strengths and weaknesses of these goals, asking students to decide what makes for a useful or meaningful goal. The focus can then shift to strategies to enact these goals. Individuals within groups could then take on different roles, including reminding students to monitor and evaluate their progress, to check task parameters and purpose, and to share ideas and strategies for task completion. These proposals assume that students need to self-assess accurately their current effectiveness as a basis for identifying strategies to make them more efficient learners. Hadwin et al (2005) also noted the importance of the teacher establishing a shared language with students for talking about self-assessment and their learning strategies.

The question of how to assess self-regulated learning has also received recent increased research attention (Boekaerts & Cascallar, 2006: Winne & Perry, 2000). Past trait-like measures of stable learner attributes have been replaced by a focus on assessing "what students are thinking, feeling, and doing while pursuing a learning goal" (Boekaerts & Cascallar, 2006, p. 207), as well as their reflections on these experiences. According to Boekaerts and Corno (2005) instruments currently used to assess various aspects of self-regulation in action include questionnaires, observations, interviews with students and

teachers, analyses of student written work, and diaries. Multiple forms of evidence are needed to capture a complex ecology of self-regulated learning performance and gains. Boekaerts and Cascallar, (2006, p. 206) pointed out that these multiple instruments were needed to attempt "to create a window on the students' perception of cues in the learning environment that help them to self-regulate skill development, as well as their motivation to improve that skill". This mix of instruments is also premised on recognition that students' self-regulatory capacities change over time because of changing self-assessment capacities, growth in domain knowledge, and altering needs.

There is also a broad consensual literature around effective schooling in the middle years. This has focused on (a) the value of large-scale curricular re-conceptualisation to make learning tasks more motivating, meaningful, and attuned to students' interests and needs, (b) an emphasis on teaching strategies that focus explicitly on how students can succeed as learners, and (c) programs that redress negative student attitudes, beliefs, understandings and values that impede engagement with learning (Martin & Marsh, 2006; Munns & Martin, 2005). As noted by Main and Bryer (2007, p. 101), teachers in the middle years "have been challenged to create a curriculum that is relevant, integrative, and exploratory". Varying degrees of success have been claimed, locally and broadly, for these diverse initiatives, (see Hunter, 2007; Pendergast *et al*, 2005).

Aims and methods of study

The WHOLE project aimed to identify key influences on students' approaches to learning and schooling in the early secondary years. The overall research questions for this study were:

1. What self-regulatory capacities do students use and what is their approach to learning?
2. What interventions increase the students' capacity for self-regulation of, and positive approaches to, their learning?

The research questions for the study reported in this paper were:

1. What self-regulatory capacities do students use to engage with English tasks?
2. What interventions and factors have a positive influence on their capacity for self-regulation of learning in this subject?

Following Merriam's case study approach (1998), this case study of student self-regulation of learning drew on 11 participant Year 8 students' beliefs and practices regarding engagement with, and completion of, two extended English tasks. The group of students (5 males and 6 females, distributed across above average, average, and below average performance in English, based on past testing) was chosen to provide insights into students' self-regulatory capacities in English, and factors influencing these capacities across their ability range. We observed the students in two lessons and in non-formal independent study at school (two hours), and interviewed students individually. She made notes during each lesson of student strategies identified in the literature as promoting self-

regulation, such as motivation to engage with tasks, planning activity, the degree of student self-reliance in working on tasks, student self-evaluation of performance as a basis for informed action, and use of peer or teacher guidance or feedback in task progress. We also observed the 11 students in independent study time, noting the extent to which they used the same strategies to work on or complete tasks, as well as any other influences on their progress. One of us also interviewed their teacher about his perceptions of the students' capacities to self-regulate their learning based on the lessons and follow-up work, but in this paper we focus on the students' perceptions.

We conducted and audiotaped two sets of interviews two to three weeks after the two introductory lessons to the two topics in English, focusing on whether students were motivated by the tasks and used self-regulatory strategies to undertake and complete work (see interview schedule for cartoon task in appendix). The interviews lasted approximately 40 minutes, based on questions collaboratively generated by me and the Year 8 English teacher. These questions focused on affective responses and student strategies for completing tasks. Independently we identified and coded participant perceptions and strategies in the transcripts, based on self-regulatory strategies noted in the literature. We then reread interview transcripts to identify and discuss emerging patterns in this coding as a basis for identifying broader themes, again drawing on insights from the literature on factors affecting student self-regulation of learning. We then discussed our findings with the teacher to confirm the accuracy of identified themes.

Research context

This study was conducted in 2008 in a school trialing a learning community (LC) of students, while the remainder of the school's curriculum was structured traditionally around a full-day timetable and allocated groupings of students by subject and year level. The trial learning community is a response by the school to a regional plan for the school to become part of a cluster of secondary colleges that aims to introduce personalised student learning plans and a more flexible approach to learning pathways and choices for students in Years 7-10. Teachers in this new environment will be expected to function more as individual coaches of groups of 16 students rather than as teachers of the traditional curriculum in timetabled classes. They will be expected to support individual students to identify and address academic goals and wellbeing needs. The teachers as student advisors will also be expected to negotiate a set of learning goals and experiences that address State curricular learning outcomes.

Schools in the cluster will be structured into learning communities of about 150 students, with some schools mixing year levels in these communities, and others focusing on a single year cohort. Each school will conduct teaching and learning programs in newly designed buildings with a mix of more open space areas and designated curriculum areas for particular subjects such as science and art. The design of the schools assumes that students will work in a range of actual and virtual contexts, including formal lessons, informal work areas, and larger open spaces for presentations, performances and virtual communities. Teachers are expected to identify and address the learning needs of

individual students, and to develop a personalised curriculum that combines a planned curriculum program of teaching and learning opportunities with more individualised and group-negotiated learning tasks of varying degrees of duration.

The School in the study was participating in a trial learning community comprising 130 students selected from years 7 and 8, with 8 teachers expected to provide a range of traditional subject-based classes and more individualised, informal coaching activities. Rather than the traditional daily timetable of scheduled lessons in each curriculum area, students were given more time for independent work on individual inquiry projects, designated as Inquiry in the daily program, where they were expected to work with their designated teacher, or other teachers in the community, and/or student groups. The students were also expected to volunteer daily for morning classes targeting particular skills in relation to English and Mathematics. These elective classes, programmed for 50 minutes, but flexible in terms of duration depending on student needs, focused on the acquisition of skills necessary for succeeding with a major assessment piece. For example, English skills addressed in these teacher-directed classes included practice at summarising, editing, as well as an explicit study of strategies appropriate to interpreting fictional texts and making a visual representation of their learning. The school's student population is drawn predominantly from low socio-economic groups with most from an Anglo-Celtic background. Teachers at the school perceived that many of their students were under-performing and disengaged from school subjects. The school's concern with the effectiveness of its curriculum for this age group led to the formation of a partnership with the research team to support subject and general curricular change to address this challenge.

Description of English program

English at the learning community was organised into large inquiry tasks around themes. This study reports on students' responses to two themes over 11 weeks in 2008: these were the theme of "identity: finding the real self" (5 weeks) and "a place called home" (6 weeks). In the first topic students were expected to undertake 2 inquiry tasks, based on a personal learning plan that was negotiated with and guided by their Home Group Advisor, culminating in a verbal presentation supported by artefacts and resources. The first inquiry task required students to research and prepare a presentation that represented their sense of themselves as learners. Students were asked to consider the following questions:

> What is learning? Some things have to be learnt for survival, some things are learnt out of significant life events, and other learning happens out of choice. Produce a table that lists examples from each category.

> From the table you have constructed, explore further examples of learning. Collect stories of learning from close family members.

> How important have significant events been for teaching you 'lessons of life'? What have you learnt about pain, endurance, beauty, acceptance, rejection,

courage, grief, happiness, parenting, and communicating? Find a way to present your thoughts about what you have learnt from these life experiences.

The second inquiry task required students to use their findings from the first inquiry to develop a presentation that explored and demonstrated their understanding of identity. Texts, including *Big Fish, Winter,* and *Love is a UFO* were studied to explore the idea of whether a person can change their identity or whether they just 'discover' it more deeply. Students were expected to construct a commentary (narrative, film, cartoon strip, storyboard or mind map) to show factors that might influence identity, including family and friends, acts of courage, accidents and illness, significant life events, media, and perceived intelligence.

We collaborated with the English teacher to design an English skill lesson on developing a plotline as a basis for identifying themes in a film, in this case through analysis of *Big Fish.* The lesson focused on why summarising is valuable in learning, how summarising of extended texts provides a way of guiding understanding, and the need to identify key parts as the basis for a sound summary. Students were invited to consider what were key events in the film and the extent to which these key events, once identified, formed a pattern that could be the basis for identifying the film's main themes.

In the second theme, students were expected to prepare a digital portfolio that explored and presented their understandings of place and how it related to home and a sense of belonging. The portfolio could be completed using a character portfolio or interview, an argumentative or persuasive piece, a poem or a cartoon/comic strip, or a comparison between contemporary Australia and one other culture, current or past. Set texts for this theme to engage students' ideas on this topic were *Boy Overboard* by Morris Gleitzman, *Lockie Leonard – Human Torpedo* by Tim Winton, and *My Place* by Nadia Wheatley and Donna Rawlins. The students were given a range of skill sessions in relation to understanding how to construct possible representations.

We collaborated with the English teacher to design an English skill lesson for students to explore and understand the form/function of meaning-making in a comic strip. To identify background knowledge and interest, students were given a broad sample of comics to read as a basis for identifying key features. Most students were only vaguely familiar with the conventions of a comic strip, but read comics regularly out of class. The lesson focused on genre-specific knowledge, inviting the students to identify options they could use to make their comic interesting. These included varying the angle of vision of the picture, the size and shape of frames, the use of colour, the varied use of close-up and long-distance perspectives to heighten the drama of the story-telling. The students were also guided by the following questions on understanding and making a comic book or storyboard.

1. How do comic book makers tell a story?

   a)   How do they show the start of the story?
   b)   How do they show time passing?

c) How do they show the characters' thoughts and speech?
d) How do they show sounds?
e) How do they show characters' feelings about what is happening?
f) How do they show the story has ended?

2. How do they try to make the story interesting for readers?

Students were then expected to work on their presentation in inquiry time supported by peers and teachers, with opportunities for them to familiarise themselves with relevant computer programs for constructing a comic strip.

Findings

The findings of the study are presented as two emerging themes to the research questions.

The self-regulatory capacities used by students to engage with English tasks

Nine of the 11 participant students (with the exceptions of Alice and Albert) demonstrated various strong self-regulatory strategies in engaging with the English lessons and subsequent inquiry work to complete tasks. As presented in the findings below (Table 1) based on student interviews and classroom observations after the plotline lesson, this group of 5 students saw value in the plotline strategy for summarising an extended text, were willing to apply the strategy to their inquiry task, had developed personal insights about their own learning, and were willing to take responsibility for their learning, but also seek help from others to achieve their own goals. They were able to use the Inquiry time to extend their understanding, learn through interactions with teachers and peers, as well as manage their independent time effectively.

The following comments are examples of another six students' responses and reflections on engaging with the comic strip task for the second topic in English.

> Instead of doing just the line with the different boxes, I overlapped the stuff, because I fitted it all on a square page…We learnt how you can't really hear a comic, so we learnt how to give the effect of sound in it (Michael)

> Instead of just explaining it, I might put more detail into it so the reader or the person who sees it gets to know it more and gets the point more (Jack)

> If you change a picture too much in each slide it just looks like it's two different pictures but if you make them change a little bit on each slide it looks like they move (Albert)

Table 1: Students' self-regulation of learning in English: Plotlines

Motivation, engagement	Self-assessment, reflection, organisation, on-task behaviours	Use of domain knowledge	Self-reliance, guidance, support from others	Final review of work	Influence of learning community (LC)
Valued novel plotline strategy (Jody, Kate, Andrew, John) Enjoyed method of summarising (Jody, Kate, Andrew, John)	Aware of weaker areas, able to do extra classes and improve through extra classes and more homework (Andrew, John) Some initial organisational challenges but appreciated having responsibility and choice (Kate) Aware of effort required practice persistence, extra work at home. Experienced confidence, participation, respect in LC (Sarah) Enjoyed choice in learning (Jody, John) Claimed effort, perseverance, participation required to make progress (Jody)	Prepared to utilise plotline in future learning (Jody, Kate, Andrew, John) Understood project basics (Sarah)	Avoided distraction by solo work (John) Valued support from friends (Sarah) Learnt about time management and work skills. Aware of areas that needed extra classes, or homework. Effort was rewarding. Appreciated support from teachers. Friends were supportive and cooperative with projects and Timetable selection. Understood and valued role of home group adviser. Appreciated seeing talents of other peers. Confident seeking help from teachers. (Kate)	Saw relevance of goal setting with future career goals (Kate) Aware of his disengagement in previous year. Aware of more personal responsibility in Inquiry. Reward from effort, pride in new skill of public presentation. (Andrew) Aware of improvement and finishing work. (Sarah)	Safety in LC to express opinions, not pressured by peers to dumb down (in contrast to previous year) Appreciated seeing talents of other peers. Confident seeking help from teachers. (Jody) Liked increased involvement of friends in LC, allowed for more work, quieter, task oriented, less hostile. Would prefer advance knowledge of timetable (Sarah) Initial timetable difficulties with LC Still issue with lack of advanced knowledge. Liked opportunities for revision and coaching. LC can be intimidating due to range of students and bigger classes. (John) Despite early challenges LC has offered increased teacher support. Claimed improved attitude in LC. (Andrew)

| | | | | | Appreciated diversity of learning community (Jody)

Claimed more students contribute in LC. Felt more comfortable in LC Appreciated lots of opportunities to practise (Andrew)

Preferred larger spaced learning area to smaller classroom setting (Kate) |
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Instead of us just sitting there and going through worksheets over and over again with stuff that we may or may not have already known, he explained it to us (Alice)

It was interesting the different angles you can use to make a cartoon more interesting…and I did use a few of the angles and I made it brighter and I had speech bubbles and everything … When he (a character) was a loner I made the scene more darker, and when he found a friend I made it more brighter. With one frame when he was a loner it just had the people picking on him, and I did a zoom in on his face with a tear. (Julie)

These comments indicate a strong sense of ownership of choices and a sense of communicative purpose for the task, aligned with Perry's (2002) assertion about the importance of domain-specific knowledge as crucial content with which self-regulatory capacities should engage. These comments also suggest that each learner perceives they are participating in a meaningful activity which is giving them fresh insights into the demands and opportunities of the task, and that from a motivational perspective they are taking pride in their achievement. Julie perceives the practice of skills such as demonstrating diversified angles or changes to the distance from the viewer as purposeful communicative expression rather than decontextualised skill practice.

The following table indicates that the interviewed students perceived the task and the lesson on the structure of comic strips to be valuable, although two students (Albert and Alice) struggled with this task, as observed in the Inquiry time, and confirmed in interviews. Five of the six students (excluding Alice) were proud of their product.

Table 2: Student self-regulation of their comic production

Motivation, engagement	Self-assessment, reflection, organisation, on task behaviours	Use of domain knowledge	Self-reliance, guidance, support from others	Final review of work	Influence of learning community
Claimed to benefit from lesson with new knowledge. (Rhonda) Changed plans as a result of beneficial lesson. (Michael, Jack) Lesson motivating. (Albert) Enjoyed new learning and understood purpose and audience. (Alice) Gained new ideas and tried to incorporate them into comic. (Julie)	Able to manage time and deadlines (Michael) Used time in Inquiry and at home. Used re-reading to assist and met deadline. (Jack) Final work after several drafts reflected book character profile. (Albert) Other parts of project more manageable and time spent on comic not rewarding. (Alice) Understood the demands of learning a new skill, time persistence, assistance. (Julie)	Confident with own drawing skill. (Michael) Able to use technology for comic production. (Jack) Able to use familiar technology (Albert) Great difficulty with technology. Made two failed attempts. (Alice) Able to use digital photos. Skills did not match desire for quality product. (Rhonda) Used initiative to learn new techniques from peers (Julie)	Independent approach. (Michael) Positive support from peers. (Jack) Highly valued support from peers. (Albert) Some positive help but also distraction from peers. (Alice) Very reliant on brother for majority of project. (Rhonda) Problem-solver via helpful peer (Julie)	Proud of work. (Michael) Positive yet realistic self assessment (Jack) Reward. Enjoyment. Achievement (not gained in other subjects). (Albert) Feelings of defeat, helplessness, lack of motivation. (Alice) Aware that final product was good. Appeared aware and troubled by her lack of involvement. (Rhonda) Confident about overall purpose of comic. Realistic self appraisal. (Julie)	Aware of distraction in Inquiry but most work done at school. (Albert) Appreciated Inquiry time and peer support. (Jack, Albert, Julie) Struggled to use Inquiry time effectively. (Alice)

Julie, Michael, Jack and Rhonda were positive about the nature of the task, were engaged in the skill lessons, were able to use the Inquiry time to develop or use technical skills, sought effective support from peers or teachers, organised themselves to complete the task effectively, and were proud of their efforts. While appearing to be mildly attentive

and interested in the initial lesson, Albert struggled to use the Inquiry time effectively. As his teacher remarked, he was a student of below average ability, and when observed during some Inquiry time was content to talk mainly with his friends and work on *Flash Player 8* to manipulate the title of a novel several times and add details to his graphic of a vehicle. In the interview Albert was able to explain the basic requirements of the task and claimed to have a lot of confidence in his knowledge and effort with the *Flash* program. He also explained that before being in the learning community he always was late for classes, not well-organised, and was "getting lost most of the time". His view on not trying hard at school was "when I muck around with my mates… and just don't hear the teacher". He had difficulty articulating his views on effort, but was aware of his actions, thoughts and feelings on the occasions when he did not try hard. He considered that he was persistent, concentrated, worked well at home, and received help from friends, but no application of skills or effective production was evident during the observation of his work in Inquiry time.

Alice seemed highly engaged in the lesson on making a comic strip, and reported in an enthusiastic manner about her plans in the interview. She considered that she had learnt "the way to set it out… you set it out differently and you catch people's eyes". However, she claimed that she could not work *Flash* and that this prevented her from completing the assignment. She also claimed to attempt to use a powerpoint alternative, but that this "wasn't like a movie…it didn't flow through like an actual story line". She claimed that she could not work in Inquiry time because "if you're in a room with people who distract you it gets really frustrating". She thought she would have succeeded if she had been taught how to use *Flash*. Her teacher considered Alice to be a student of below average ability who struggled to cope with academic expectations. Alice also said in the interview that she thought the task was "beyond me", even if "the comic was a good idea for people that could do *Flash*".

Interventions and factors promoting self-regulatory capacities in Year 8 English students

The interviews with students indicated that the new context of the learning community, with its changed structure of classes, and with teachers expecting students to undertake independent work in Inquiry time had positive effects on student perceptions, opportunities and practices in relation to self-regulation of their learning. While students noted that these expectations (a) made learning more challenging, (b) produced anxiety about the sign-up process for elective skill sessions, (c) led to contact with some students in inquiry time that distracted them from working, and (d) reduced the chance of regularly working with friends in elective classes, they noted various benefits from this new set of learning opportunities. The following comments are examples of their responses and reflections on working in this new environment:

> Well I would never put my hand up and answer questions and things like that, and I do that now because the teachers are helpful and like I said there's no wrong answers and they encourage you (Kate)

> It's been very different to my normal classes like when I started here, there's a lot more choice which I've never had in any subjects before and there's a lot more freedom to present and explain the work, things that I want to explain in my projects (Jody)

> I reckon you get a bit more help this way, like you are spending a lot more time with other people you get to know them and you just help each other out (John)

> The learning community's helped me a lot so far like it's easier to do work one on one with teachers if you need to. The old system you kinda got kids at the back, normally me and a couple of mates having a chat, and not really engaging in what we were learning (Andrew)

> Just the pressure from all the other kids thinking that you have to impress them as well, or otherwise you'll get picked on saying you're dumb and all that sort of stuff, but like in this community they don't care about how good you are (Kate)

> You can get more done. People are working and you can get more done (Sarah)

These comments indicate that students had positive attitudes towards what they perceived as a changed classroom and school ethos, with opportunities for more individualised work with teachers. The absence of a continuous daily scheduled syllabus, while involving students in some transitional anxieties about new demands and uncertainties, had a positive effect on their sense of their role as learners in this new environment. Jody and Kate commented on the novelty and value of having more responsibility for their learning, and having to nominate individual learning goals with their advisor teacher. As noted by Jody, "It's been very helpful to have more freedom with our choices of classes…and with your goals you decide them individually, by yourself and put them down on paper".

Implications

This study reconfirms the complexity of factors that contribute to conditions conducive to students developing effective self-regulation of their learning. In this case, the introduction of the learning community seems to have had a strong enabling effect for many students by (a) promoting a more focused approach to the syllabus, (b) raising expectations about students' capacities and providing opportunities for students to pursue more independent learning pathways drawing on peer and teacher guidance, (c) setting up a context where teachers routinely worked more individually with students, and (d) creating a strong explicit focus on how learners learn, and effective ways to organise this learning. As noted by MacBeath (2006), and many others, an explicit focus by teachers on the nature of learning and on strategies for how students can become more efficient learners is a crucial condition for promoting student self-regulatory learning behaviour. While the learning community is in its first year of operation, and will no doubt go through various revisions of focus and structure, the early evidence suggests a range of benefits to students' attitudes and learning from what is a multi-dimensional intervention into how students experience the curriculum and organise their experience of school.

The study also indicates that under supportive conditions, students can demonstrate a broad range of self-regulatory learning behaviours in engaging with junior secondary English. Where the task is seen as meaningful, where relevant goals and skills are directly addressed through co-regulatory processes, where there are repeated informal opportunities to customise the task to individual preferences, where there is timely support and responsive feedback from peers and teachers, then students can demonstrate self-regulatory learning capacities. In seeking to support all students meeting the various challenges of engaging successfully with extended and complex learning tasks, the teachers at the school are considering the introduction of more tracking strategies to monitor student academic progress and organisational skills more precisely and provide more timely guidance.

This study suggests that setting up an environment that supports the development of independent learners poses a range of interconnected challenges. These include (a) catering precisely for ability and interest diversity of students through a differentiated curriculum that enables all learners to experience academic success and a sense of wellbeing, (b) providing a range of structured and informal learning spaces (actual and virtual) that accommodate student diversity and the potentiality for reflection and growth, and which minimise possible negative effects of peer pressure and past histories of individual and collective under-achievement, (c) developing precise frameworks for monitoring student progress, and (d) providing adequate support for teachers to succeed in identifying and addressing individual student learning needs in collaborative and sustainable ways. This study indicates that the practices in the learning community considered in this research provide some insights into how to address these challenges.

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Appendix

Interview questions: Cartoon task

I am interested in what you thought about the lesson on how to make your cartoon interesting and effective.

Did it make you keen to work on your cartoon? Did you learn anything new?
Did you get any new ideas for how to make your cartoon, or what to add?

How did you go about tackling your cartoon project?
Did you follow a plan you had before the lesson, or did you adapt some ideas from the lesson?
Did you make many changes to your plans as you made the cartoon? If you did, why did you change your plans or approach?

I would also like to know more about how you went about making the cartoon, how you organised yourself, and where and when you did this project.

How did you decide what to do? Did you keep checking on how you were going?
Did you use Inquiry time to work on it? How useful did you find Inquiry time for completing your comic?
Did you get help or feedback from friends, or did you work totally on your own?
Did you get it done on time? Why/why not?

How would you rate your effort on your cartoon?

Sue Harrison is a research assistant for the WHOLE project in the Faculty of Education. La Trobe University, Bendigo.
Professor Vaughan Prain is the Research Director, Faculty of Education, La Trobe University, Bendigo. Email: v.prain@latrobe.edu.au